The Connection Between Student Achievement and Ongoing Teacher Development

We provide this information as the leaders of four Washington educational associations because of our concern about professional learning. Educators across Washington State are committed to helping all students successfully meet the state’s challenging new learning standards. A critical tool in achieving that success is providing teachers with collaborative, job-embedded professional learning opportunities.

We strongly encourage a phase-in of state funding to support this type of ongoing professional development. With significant system changes, particularly new state standards in math, science, and English language arts, this training is critical to the success of our students who will be held accountable for passing assessments based on these new standards next school year. Teachers are also held accountable for this kind of ongoing collaboration as one of the eight criteria in the new evaluation system.

There is a strong body of research supporting this approach. In their 2009 report titled “Professional Learning in the Learning Profession,” the National Staff Development Council summarized this research on professional learning for educators. A few of their key findings include:

• Intensive professional development of 49 hours in a year boosted student achievement by approximately 21 percentile points.
• Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, connected to practice, and builds strong working relationships among teachers.
• Nations that outperform the U.S. on international assessments invest heavily in this type of professional learning.
• U.S. teachers spend about 80 percent of their day engaged in classroom instruction, as compared to about 60 percent for these other nations’ teachers.

This research, coupled with zero state funding for professional development, has led many school districts to adopt a schedule of student releases to provide teachers with this kind of professional learning within the state-funded school day. The effectiveness of this approach may be one reason that Washington continues to perform among the top ten states in NAEP results, while in funding support we rank in the bottom ten states (Education Week, “Quality Counts.” January 9, 2014).

Would you like more information?

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Early release time has been essential for our teachers. We are able to create common formative assessments to ensure learning for all students. This work would not get done without early release time.

Christina Thomas, Principal, Lake Washington High School

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HIGHLIGHTS AROUND THE STATE

The following samples include one school district in each of the nine ESD regions:

Nearest Washington Educational Service District 101

The Nine Mile Falls School District uses a 40-minute late start every Thursday morning. During this time, instructors and administrators focus and reflect on individual and collective student learning outcomes. Weekly collaboration allows staff to implement interventions for struggling students as well as those who need greater challenges.

—Brian Talbott, Superintendent, Nine Mile Falls School District

Educational Service District 105

Grandview School District releases students 90 minutes early every Friday afternoon. Time is dedicated to teachers learning how to improve instruction in every classroom. Each meeting is focused on three activities: learning new teaching strategies, examining student data from the recent week’s performance, and developing common lessons and assessments to address the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

—Kevin Chen, Superintendent, Grandview School District

Educational Service District 112

In the Kelso School District, all schools release students every Wednesday afternoon, 90 minutes early. Staff members collaborate around the instructional framework. Cycles of inquiry measuring student growth align CCSS work vertically and horizontally, and review student achievement data that drives their instructional decisions for the next week. These teams are highly focused and submit meeting notes to their principal for review. This laser focus allows the implementation of the major initiatives within our district and state. We are passionate that collaboration time around student growth and achievement is the right work.

—Robert MacGregor, Superintendent, Kelso School District

Capital Region Educational Service District 113

Yelm Community Schools utilizes a weekly, one-hour late start for Professional Learning Communities (PLC). It is used to ensure high levels of student learning in every classroom. Key practices include: identifying the state and national learning standards for every course, developing skills to deliver research-based instructional strategies, creating and scoring assessments to accurately measure student learning, and crafting clearly articulated plans of action for diverse learners based on assessment results. This focused, collaborative work is essential for developing teachers’ skills and abilities to increase student achievement.

—Andy Wolfe, Superintendent, Yelm Community Schools

Olympic Educational Service District 114

Improved instruction results in student achievement, which the Chimacum School District is taking seriously. A weekly, 65-minute release day in grades K-5 provides our teachers training on assessment, student engagement, and CCSS. These past two years, the four additional release days district-wide has enabled our teachers to work together on becoming proficient with the instructional framework.

—Rich Stewart, Superintendent, Chimicum School District

Puget Sound Educational Service District 121

Enumclaw releases students 75 minutes early every Friday afternoon. During that time, each staff member meets with their PLC team. These small, grade-level/course-level teams analyze student learning results and develop interventions to improve learning. The laser focus in these meetings is how teaching will change Monday morning to better help ALL students succeed!

—Mike Nelson, Superintendent, Enumclaw School District

Northwest Educational Service District 123

Kennewick releases elementary and middle school students 60 minutes early every Wednesday and high school students three hours early once a month. Principals utilize a portion of the time to train staff on building, district, and state initiatives such as new curriculum, CCSS, TPEP, the Danielson instructional model, Smarter Balanced assessments, changing graduation requirements, and assessment systems. The remainder of the time is used by teachers to work in PLCs to plan lessons, analyze data related to student learning, develop common assessments aligned to state standards, and share effective instructional strategies and interventions.

—Dave Bond, Superintendent, Greg Fancher, Assistant Superintendent, and Ron Williamson, Assistant Superintendent, Kennewick School District

Puget Sound Educational Service District 125

Everett Public Schools releases students 75 minutes early on the last Friday of every month. It is used for teams by subject area and one for district-wide trainings (such as instructional framework and TPEP activities related to legislative action. This collaborative time is an essential component of our district’s academic performance. Impacting this time will have severe unintended consequences on the ability of our professionals to positively impact student learning.

—Steve Heske, Superintendent, Cascade School District

North Central Educational Service District 171

Cascade School District starts school late by 90 minutes every Wednesday morning. Out of each month, two Wednesdays are scheduled for building PLC team time, one is used for teams by subject area and one for district-wide trainings and TPEP activities. The remainder of the time is used by teachers to share effective instructional strategies and interventions to improve learning.

—Steve Heske, Superintendent, Cascade School District

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—Lon Butler, Principal Ridge View Elementary

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